

According to the scriptures, it is particularly dangerous to be angry with and engage in harmful actions directed toward Bodhisattvas because they have dedicated their entire lives to the welfare of all sentient beings and thus any harm directed toward them is directed indirectly toward all sentient beings. In this way the negative karma accumulated in relation to Bodhisattvas is multiplied equal to the number of sentient beings.

Furthermore, it is simply not possible to judge someone correctly merely by observing their physical and verbal actions. Therefore, we should make extra effort to pay less attention to others' behaviour and more attention to *our own*. We should train ourselves to become extremely mindful of our own body, speech, and mind especially during our dealings with others.

After we have encountered someone we dislike, we should take some time to analyze our state of mind at the time of the meeting. If we find that our mind was unruly and undisciplined, passing all sorts of judgments, we should determine that in the future we will refrain from such behaviour, and apply the antidotes of meditating on karma, death, patience, etc.

In brief, true Dharma practice does not always take place in the peaceful and serene environment of a meditational retreat but during our dealings with others. Therefore, in all situations we should work toward decreasing our faults and increasing our good qualities; we should try to change *ourselves* before trying to change others.

As the karmic result of our attitude of respect and reverence toward the Sangha we will receive support and assistance from the Sangha in the future, enabling us to proceed faster on the way to purifying and developing our mind.

The ***King of Concentration Sutra*** says:

*You will obtain a result similar
To the kinds of karma you do.*

2) The general precepts (which relate to the three Jewels in general)

There are six general precepts:

- a) By recalling the distinctions and good qualities of the Three Jewels, take refuge again and again
- b) By recalling the great kindness of the Three Jewels, strive to worship them constantly and offer the first portion of your food and drink
- c) Establish other living beings in this practice and consider them with compassion
- d) Whatever activity you engage in, and whatever your purpose, make offerings and supplications to the Three Jewels, forsaking any worldly methods.
- e) After you have understood the benefits, take refuge three times at the day and three times at night
- f) Maintain your refuge and do not forsake the three Jewels, even in jest or at the cost of your life

a) By recalling the distinctions and good qualities of the Three Jewels, take refuge again and again

Without knowing the distinctions and good qualities of the Three Jewels, we cannot take refuge properly. Therefore, in order to be able to swiftly progress in our Buddhist practice we need to repeatedly recollect what we have learned about the Three Jewels and repeatedly take refuge. We need to remember the good qualities of the Buddha, the good qualities of the Dharma, and the good qualities of the Sangha. We need to reflect upon the differences between the Three Jewels based on their defining characteristics, their activities, devotion, practice, recollection, and on how to increase merit (see handouts 8, 9 & 10), and we need to repeatedly become aware of the difference between Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

Furthermore, we must ask ourselves, why we are taking refuge. What do we sincerely want to achieve and what are the faults and shortcomings we must overcome in order to reach our goal? Combined with fear based on wisdom, that is, healthy fear of our faults and shortcomings we then

cultivate faith (i.e. faith based on reasoning) that the Three Jewels have the power to free us of these faults.

Many people have an instinctive urge to entrust themselves in a superior being who can liberate them from their problems and difficulties. However, since from a Buddhist point of view, there is no omnipotent creator who can spontaneously take away our sufferings, we should generate a realistic understanding of the kind of superior being, or superior *beings*, who can realistically guide us toward the removal of our faults and thus out of our dissatisfactory existence.

b) By recalling the great kindness of the Three Jewels, strive to worship them constantly and offer the first portion of your food and drink

Having repeatedly reflected on the good qualities of the Three Jewels we come to understand their extraordinary kindness. The Three Jewels are able to provide us with the most valuable gifts, the gifts of liberation and full enlightenment. Therefore, we should try our utmost to repay their kindness by following their instructions. Furthermore, we should try to repay their kindness by worshipping and making offerings to them. Before we eat or drink something we should always take a moment to offer the food or drink to the Three Jewels.

The *King of Concentration Sutra* says:

Because of the Buddhas' merit they find food.

The childish do not show their gratitude.

This passage can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation is that the Buddhas do not need our offering of food since they have enough merit to provide them with everything they need. Hence the only reason we make offerings to them is for our personal benefit.

Another interpretation of the passage is that we owe the fact that we have food, drink, and all the other necessities we require to lead a relatively healthy and happy life, to the Buddhas. The reason for this is that those necessities are the result of positive karma we accumulated in the past. Positive karma, in turn, is accumulated as a result of the enlightened activities of Buddhas, since Buddhas emanate in different forms in order to teach us to engage in beneficial actions. Therefore, our temporary happiness and well-being, symbolized by food and drink, are the result of the merit or positive potential of the Buddhas.

Making offerings to the Three Jewels is thus explained to be an extremely powerful method to show our gratitude and in that way open ourselves to the assistance, support and blessings of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It creates a special bond between us and the Three Jewels, and becomes the cause for them accompanying us on our journey to enlightenment.

Furthermore, worshipping and making offerings also constitutes a powerful method to accumulating merit. The main obstacles to spiritual progress are the lack of merit, i.e. the lack of positive karma, and the presence of obstacles, i.e. the ripening of negative karma. Therefore, the entire range of different Buddhist practices can be subsumed under two major practices: accumulating merit and purifying obstructions.

However, those two do not exclude each other, for by accumulating merit we may purify obstructions, and by purifying obstructions we accumulate merit.

As explained above, a positive action can become extremely compelling in dependence on the motivation, the action, and the object of the action. Therefore, practising generosity by making an offering to the Three Jewels motivated, for instance, by the wish to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings is a fast and effective way to accumulate great merit.

In short, making offerings to the Three Jewels is a very powerful practice, and we can observe many highly realized Lamas spending a considerable amount of time making actual or visualized offerings. Furthermore, many texts, in particular the *Array of Stalks Sutra* and the *Prayer of Samantabhadra*, contain descriptions of even the highest, tenth ground Bodhisattvas making extensive offerings to the Three Jewels. Therefore, if those highly advanced practitioners engage in such practices we should certainly follow their example.

